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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000056

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E
NSC FOR AFRICA SENIOR DIRECTOR COURVILLE
PARIS/LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHER
DEFENSE FOR ISA/AF DAS WHELAN
JOINT STAFF FOR CJCS PACE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2015

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SUBJECT: MEETING OF DJIBOUTI'S PRESIDENT WITH CHAIRMAN OF
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Peter Pace, met January 2 in Djibouti with President Ismail Omar Guelleh during CJCS's stopover with a USO troupe traveling in theater. The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the Somalia situation dominated the 40-minute conversation. Guelleh saw no early solution to the conflict between the two East African states, which he described as now very personal between their leaders. On Somalia, he pressed for coalition action to deter piracy and warned of continued extremist influence that could keep Somalia unstable for the near term. Guelleh also expressed appreciation for the visit of the CJCS, praised the civil affairs projects in Djibouti of the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) based at Camp Lemonier and noted the special place of Lemonier as the U.S.'s only military base in Africa. End summary.

12. (C) Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Peter Pace, joined by Ambassador, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) based at Camp Lemonier, General Timothy F. Ghormley, and Executive Assistant to General Pace, Col. David Teeple, met January 2 with Djibouti's President, Ismail Omar Guelleh. Hassan Said, Djibouti's Director of National Security Services (NSS), responsible for intelligence, also sat in. The meeting, which took place at the presidential palace, came during a stopover in Djibouti for the CJCS as he escorted a USO troupe in the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Afghanistan and East Africa theaters.

13. (C) Guelleh initiated with an expression of thanks to General Pace for his visit. He also praised CJTF-HOA for its civil affairs work in Djibouti. Guelleh cited especially CJTF-HOA's work in well-drilling, rehabilitation of schools and in health projects, including distribution of medicines. He also made note, with a hint of pride, that Camp Lemonier remained the U.S.'s only military base in Africa. General Pace responded that he was pleased to be in Djibouti and that he appreciated the help Djibouti was rendering to the U.S. and in support of CJTF-HOA operations. While troops are trained to fight, work of this kind can be very helpful and it is good to know that this work is very much appreciated by Djibouti.

14. (C) Turning to regional issues, General Pace sought Guelleh's views of the future in the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Guelleh responded that the Chairman's question was a difficult one. Nevertheless, he expressed the view that hostilities could not resume between the two nations because of the weak economy of Eritrea. At the same time, reconciliation is distant because the conflict had become personal between the leaders of both countries. Neither Isaias nor Meles are "ready" to compromise. Guelleh also said African nations, the U.S. and Europe had all tried to facilitate dialogue between the two sides, but to no avail. Now, Isaias is frustrated and perhaps, Guelleh added, in possession of a "suicidal mentality" because he wants to go to war. Ethiopia knows this. On the Ethiopian side, the extreme right of the opposition is trying to push Meles to "re-conquer and re-occupy" Eritrea and then "re-negotiate" issues. Meles is resisting, Guelleh added. Guelleh told General Pace he was not optimistic about an early solution and was convinced a state of "no war, no peace" would continue in the near term.

15. (C) General Pace asked about the future of U.N. observers. Guelleh opined that the U.N. observers were initially used as a condition to pressure Ethiopia. Now, by expulsion, Eritrea has lost needed income because the observers are no longer spending money in country. There are other problems, Guelleh said. Eritrea is not pleased with Voice of America (VOA) programming in Somali and Amharic and democracy has proved difficult to put in place there. In Eritrea, the government plays all roles. If there is no development, the population will flee the country. In addition, a minority of people are playing a very damaging role. They are trying to

mislead the population by creating instability. General Pace observed that democracy can sometimes develop very slowly, but when it is in place it works very well. Guelleh agreed but blamed the media as not being helpful in the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. He likened reporters in both countries to "paparazzi" who would go to any length to get a story they thought would be lucrative to them even if it causes overall damage.

16. (C) General Pace inquired about the economic impact on Djibouti of Ethiopia and specifically on Djibouti's plans for development. Guelleh replied that his country was in the process of strong development in order to meet the growing needs of its main client Ethiopia. An oil terminal is in place. In 2006, a new container terminal will be built with a goal to receive and handle 1,500,000 containers annually. Guelleh also said Djibouti was investing a great deal in this port project. Djibouti's goal is to be in a position to be competitive should the situation change. "Unlike Eritrea, where the spirit is that politics comes first and the economy second, ours is that the economy comes first, then politics," Guelleh said. He added that security should also be a primary concern for a nation.

17. (C) Guelleh noted specifically to General Pace his concern about security and Somalia. He said the Somalis are increasing their acts of piracy but he was unsure of actions coalition nations might be taking to circumvent piracy. He expressed a desire to see the international coalition discourage such acts. General Pace said discussions are underway on the best way ahead on the issue of piracy off the Somali coast. The problem, General Pace continued, is that countries whose vessels are being detained are quick to pay ransom. Guelleh responded that the time to act is now to slow down these "destabilizing forces." General Pace noted that piracy was of no cost to its perpetrators and Guelleh expressed his agreement with this assessment.

18. (C) Guelleh told General Pace that the new government of Somalia is trying to deal with both warlords and religious militias. Everyone has his militia, including members of the business community. Discussions are underway to improve the situation but it will take time. For example, the European Union is helping out with the police force. Guelleh offered the view that Somalia's problems today can be placed at the feet of former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali. "Ghali misled everyone," he said. "It was so easy at that time (to make a difference.)" Since then, according to Guelleh, Hassan Turabi of Sudan and his supporters -- as friends of Osama bin Laden -- seized an opportunity." "Now we see the example," the President continued, "of people clamoring that there can be no peace in Iraq without the elimination of foreign occupiers." Guelleh discounted the notion and said "pulling back happened in Somalia and the result was not positive. "If America pulls back from Iraq, there will be no more Iraq," Guelleh stated. "It will be worse than Somalia." The President also said that with the current situation, no country "dares" now to offer troops to stabilize Somalia." He said a few Sudanese remain in Somalia on the compound of Aideed's son and "are working with Al-Ittihad Al-Islamiya (AIAI), especially in the Ethiopian territory of the Ogaden." Guelleh opined that the Sudanese in Somalia today "have no where to go" and would be at risk for their safety should they leave Mogadishu.

19. (U) General Pace has cleared on this message.
RAGSDALE